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SUBJECT: JAPAN-IRAN: FOREIGN MINISTER NAKASONE VISITS
TEHRAN, MEETS AHMADINEJAD AND MOTAKI

REF: TOKYO 994

TOKYO 00001067 001.2 OF 005

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Jim Zumwalt for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Japanese Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone visited Tehran May 2 where he met separately with President Ahmadinejad and Foreign Minister Motaki. In a conversation with Charge d'Affaires, MOFA Director General for Middle Eastern and African Affairs Toshiro Suzuki characterized the talks as "candid and cordial." Nakasone stressed to the Iranians that Japan believes the United States is serious about engaging with Iran and that, accordingly, Iran should not miss this opportunity and must respond in a visible, concrete manner. Both Ahmadinejad and Motaki responded that they would welcome a change in U.S. policy but words are not enough; Iran is waiting for concrete action. They added that the U.S. has been sending mixed messages and, given the bad relations of the last thirty years, Iran remains very suspicious of the United States. Nakasone also raised the case of Roxana Saberi. Ahmadinejad said a review of her case by Iran's "independent" judicial branch is underway, and that he hopes for a "positive" outcome. However, he warned that since she has been accused of spying, overt pressure from President Obama and the United States on her behalf would likely prove counter-productive. On the nuclear issue, Iran's position remains unchanged: Motaki insisted Iran is developing nuclear energy exclusively for peaceful purposes, that it has every right to do so, and that Iran will cooperate fully with the IAEA. Nakasone did not raise Ahmadinejad's recent remarks in Geneva, or Iran's support for Hamas or Hizbollah. As for their assessment of the meetings, Suzuki reported that the Japanese believed they had raised the subjects that needed to be raised, that they don't expect any quick changes, but they hope Nakasone's visit will have some impact on Iranian deliberations. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Foreign Minister Nakasone was pleased with his May 2 visit to Tehran, according to MOFA DG for Middle Eastern and African Affairs Suzuki who briefed Charge d'Affaires on May 7, following Suzuki's return to Japan with the Foreign Minister. He said that Nakasone had met with President Ahmadinejad for approximately 50 minutes and with FM Motaki for nearly three hours, and that he had "very candid and cordial" discussions with both. Suzuki said that Japan and Iran have tried to maintain friendly relations for the past

several years and accordingly, even though much of what Nakasone had to say might have been offensive to the Iranian side, they listened to Japan's message with sincerity.

JAPAN'S MESSAGE ON ENGAGEMENT WITH THE U.S.

13. (C) According to Suzuki, FM Nakasone in both his meetings sought to make the following points:

-- Japan believes the U.S. is very serious about engagement with Iran, and Japan will cooperate to help make this happen, if desired;

-- Secretary Clinton told Nakasone when they met at The Hague that the U.S. is open to discuss diplomatic engagement with Iran;

-- Iran should not miss this opportunity, as the U.S. administration is pursuing the dialogue option in spite of internal policy differences in Washington;

-- Iran must respond to the steps already taken by the U.S.; this response must consist of visible, concrete actions.

AHMADINEJAD RESPONDS

14. (C) President Ahmadinejad responded to Nakasone that Iran would welcome "real change" in U.S. policy, and that it welcomes the change of language being used by President Obama. He asserted that in response to this new language,

TOKYO 00001067 002.2 OF 005

Iran has also altered its language. Ahmadinejad said he wants to believe that the President is producing change, but unfortunately Iran is still getting conflicting messages. He cited recent statements by the P5 plus 1 and by Secretary Clinton that sounded to him like the "old" policy of the previous administration. "Threatening the Iranian population will not work," he said. Ahmadinejad continued that given the complex and negative nature of the U.S.-Iran relationship, he doesn't think things will be solved easily, and that the U.S. side must take concrete steps to repair the relationship first, since it was the U.S. that unilaterally decided to sever relations.

MOTAKI'S VIEWS

15. (C) Motaki's response to Nakasone's message was similar. According to Suzuki, Motaki said that it will be difficult to resolve in the short term the issues that divide the U.S. and Iran. Confidence building, he said, will not be easy and will require patience. Iran wants to support President Obama's engagement policy, and if the U.S. clearly demonstrates its goodwill, Iran will reciprocate. However, Iran is not getting a clear signal. He suggested the U.S. should appoint a special envoy to engage in discussions with Iran. He also said that Secretary Clinton's recent statement was not helpful and that it was the same as the Bush Administration's. (NOTE: The Japanese were not clear on what statement Motaki was referring to and speculated it was the release of the Department's report on terrorism. Motaki mentioned that although the recognition of the MEK as a terrorist group was a good first step, there was nothing else new. END NOTE.) Mentioning thirty years of bad relations, Motaki emphasized that the U.S. side must clearly show what, exactly, engagement means, saying that the Iranians do not understand what the scenario is. "Is there one? What is its content? The U.S. is inviting Iran into a room, but we need to know what's in the room waiting for us before we can enter." Despite this, Motaki asserted that Iran is serious

about improving the relationship.

16. (C) Suzuki reported that Nakasone rejoined to both Ahmadinejad and Motaki that if both sides are waiting for the other to take the first step, there will be no movement. The U.S., he said, has signaled its readiness and has taken a number of steps. It is now up to Iran to respond seriously.

SABERI CASE

17. (C) FM Nakasone also raised with both Ahmadinejad and Motaki the case of Roxana Saberi, stating that Japan is "seriously concerned" about her arrest and conviction, and has been following her case very closely. He said that while Japan respects Iran's judicial system, Tokyo hopes that further proceedings will be highly transparent, that a just outcome will result, and that she will be released as soon as possible. Ahmadinejad responded that Iran's judicial branch is independent, but that he'll do what he can to "coordinate" to secure Saberi's rights. He said that since she has been charged with spying, outside pressure only serves to complicate the issue. He concluded that a review of the case is underway and that he hopes for a "positive" outcome.

18. (C) FM Motaki's response was similar, said Suzuki. However, Motaki stressed that Saberi is an Iranian citizen and said that she will be treated like any other Iranian citizen. Nevertheless, the government has asked the judiciary to review her case, and he hopes it will be dealt with in a "just and humane" manner. (NOTE: On the margins of the meetings, the Japanese also discussed Saberi's case with Iranian Ambassador to Tokyo Sayed Abbas Araghchi, who was in Tehran for the visit. Araghchi, who personally knows Saberi (ref.), said that he has discussed her case with Iran's National Security Council, which is also involved, and that he continues to hope for a positive outcome. END NOTE.)

TOKYO 00001067 003.2 OF 005

NUCLEAR ISSUE

19. (C) Suzuki reported that FM Nakasone also raised the nuclear issue, noting that Japan is concerned about Iran's enrichment activities and that it is imperative that Iran comply with the United Nations Security Council resolutions pertaining to its nuclear program. It is important, Nakasone continued, for Iran to restore trust with the international community, and he urged them to take concrete steps to do so. A good first step would be to respond to the P5 plus 1 overtures so that talks can proceed.

110. (C) The Iranian response, said Suzuki, was the same as always. President Ahmadinejad repeated earlier statements that Iran has no intention of producing a nuclear weapon, that nuclear weapons are outdated, that those who possess them bring danger to themselves, and that he doesn't want them for Iran. It is the United States, he continued, that must demilitarize nuclear power. Motaki, also, stated that Iran's program is peaceful, that Iran opposes nuclear weapons, is preparing a response to the P5 plus 1, and will cooperate with the IAEA. In what Suzuki termed "strange logic," Motaki continued that Iran just wants to be treated like Japan, which has long had a nuclear program but has never been asked to stop or cease production by the international community. Nakasone rejoined that Japan has always fully cooperated with the IAEA and pays it substantial sums to finance it's own inspections.

IRAN-DPRK COOPERATION

¶11. (C) FM Nakasone told the Iranians that Japan is anxious about Tehran's relationship with North Korea, particularly to the extent that there is any cooperation in the nuclear and missile fields. According to Suzuki, Ahmadinejad did not respond directly, saying only that Iran will help Japan solve its problems with North Korea. Motaki stated that there is no nuclear cooperation between the two countries and that Iran has developed its own missile capabilities. (NOTE: One press report following the visit indicated that Motaki stated Iran is helping North Korea with its missile program. MOFA Iran Unit Chief Junichi Sumi, who was an interpreter during the visit, told Embassy he never heard Motaki make such a statement. END NOTE.)

AFGHANISTAN, OTHER ISSUES

¶12. (C) FM Nakasone and FM Motaki also discussed several bilateral and regional issues. On Afghanistan, they touched upon their recent agreement to work together to train Afghan border guards and to provide assistance to Afghan refugees inside Iran who may be returning to Afghanistan. Motaki said that Iran is addressing the problems in Afghanistan in a serious manner and has invited both Afghan President Karzai and Pakistani President Zardari to Tehran. Iran, he said, wants to form a regional grouping to address this issue and hopes the U.S. will support this idea.

¶13. (C) The two sides agreed to work to enhance cultural exchanges and also discussed Japan International Cooperation Agency activities in Iran, specifically those dealing with energy conservation. Iran hopes to boost its economic relations with Japan, but Suzuki reported that any talks on this subject were in general terms only. Nakasone repeated the same message that has been conveyed to the Iranians in the past: Japan considers the bilateral relationship to be generally good, but there are constraints, and further developments to the relationship cannot be considered until "better circumstances" exist.

WHAT WASN'T SAID

TOKYO 00001067 004.2 OF 005

¶14. (C) Responding to a question from Charge, Suzuki admitted that neither President Ahmadinejad's recent statements in Geneva, nor Iran's support for Hamas and Hizbollah had been raised during the meetings. He said that talking points had been prepared but these subjects had not come up due to time constraints. On Ahmadinejad's Geneva speech, Suzuki said that Japan believes Iran "got the message" from the walkout and the subsequent outcry. He also said that although not raised explicitly, he believes the Iranians clearly understand Nakasone's consistent Middle East Peace Process message that "Iran must behave more responsibly."

JOINT PRESS STATEMENT

¶15. (C) Suzuki reported that the Iranians wanted to conclude the visit with some type of formally signed memorandum, but the Japanese held out for simple joint press briefing. According to our unofficial translation of the Japanese text, Nakasone was fairly blunt in his statement. He said that in order to develop the bilateral relationship further, efforts to improve the international environment are needed. "On the issues of the international community, I, as a friend of Iran, frankly shared the severe views the international society, including Japan, has on the nuclear problem and the regional situation." He noted that Japan shares the international community's concern about Iran's enrichment program and believes it is important for Iran to recover the

confidence of the international community by complying with the UNSCRs, and that it is important for Iran to take swift and positive responses for advancement of negotiations with the EU3 plus 3. "About the Obama administration's new engagement policy, I told FM Motaki that the U.S is truly striving for dialogue with Iran, and Iran, without missing this opportunity, should respond positively and take concrete action." He also urged Iran to play a "constructive role" to achieve regional stability, addressed Afghanistan, and noted Japan's concerns about Roxana Saberi.

ATMOSPHERICS

¶16. (C) Suzuki described Ahmadinejad as "quiet and composed." The meeting started three hours late, at 9:00 PM, but the President did not look tired or distracted. Thirty minutes had been allocated for the meeting, but it lasted fifty minutes, including Farsi to Japanese interpretation. Ahmadinejad made a short opening statement, but then asked Nakasone what he had to say and listened patiently to the Japanese presentation. Suzuki said he had expected him to "speak more and listen less" but this was not the case. His responses to Nakasone were delivered in a candid and "ordinary" manner. He spoke with no notes and knew his brief, although a couple of times Motaki interjected a point to prompt him.

COMMENT

¶17. (C) Although Suzuki claims that the Japanese were generally pleased with the visit, we think they can't help but be disappointed. They were aware of our concerns about the propriety of making the trip and had called in Ambassador Araghchi prior to departing to emphasize that Japan expected more than just talk (ref.). Apparently, that's all they got. When asked to provide an overall assessment of the visit, the best Suzuki could come up with was to say he and his colleagues are "still discussing" the outcome. He rather defensively said that "we said what we think needed to be said" and although they don't expect there to be quick changes in Iranian behavior, MOFA is hopeful that perhaps Nakasone's comments will play a role in Iranian deliberations. Suzuki also said that Iranian politics are much more politicized than usual at present in the run-up to next months elections, and that now is probably not the time

TOKYO 00001067 005.2 OF 005

to expect bold new policies. He concluded that Japan and Iran have had a "solid" relationship for some time, and that the Iranians listen to what the Japanese have to say, even if it is painful for them to do so.

ZUMWALT